



Benefits of Greenways

A multi-objective greenway system for Asheville can address and resolve many community issues that affect the future environmental and economic health of the City. Greenways have been implemented by other communities to provide for recreation and alternative transportation, control flooding, improve water quality, protect wetlands, conserve habitat for wildlife, and buffer adjacent land uses. Greenways typically incorporate varying types and intensity of human use, including trails for recreation and alternative transportation, and passive and active park facilities, including open play fields. Greenways have also been shown to increase the value of adjacent private properties as an amenity to residential and commercial developments. These, and other, benefits of an Asheville greenway network are described in the following pages.



Transportation Benefits

In past years, most American communities have grown in a sprawling, suburban form as a result of dependence upon the automobile as the sole means of transportation. Americans have abandoned some traditional forms of transportation (such as passenger train service), and have been slow to improve other forms of transportation (bicycle and pedestrian networks, bus systems, local train service). In order to provide relief from congested streets and highways in Asheville, future transportation planning and development should be concentrated on providing a choice in mode of travel to local residents. These mode choices should offer the same benefits and appeal currently offered by the automobile: efficiency, safety, comfort, reliability and flexibility.



Greenway corridors throughout Asheville can serve as extensions of the road network, offering realistic and viable connections between origins and destinations such as work, schools, libraries, parks, shopping areas, and tourist attractions. Greenway-based bikeways and walkways are most effective for certain travel distances. National surveys by the Federal Highway Administration have shown that Americans are willing to walk as far as two miles to a destination, and bike as far as five miles. It is easily conceivable that destinations can be linked to multiple origins throughout the City with a combination of off-road trails and on-road bicycle and pedestrian facilities.

Economic Benefits

Greenways offer numerous economic benefits to the City of Asheville, including higher real property values, increased tourism and recreation related revenues, and cost savings for public services. Greenways have been shown to raise the value of immediately adjacent properties by as much as 5 to 20 percent. For example, in a new development in Raleigh, North Carolina, new lots situated on greenways were priced \$5,000 higher than comparable lots off the greenway. Many home buyers and corporations are looking for real estate that provides direct access to public and private greenway systems. Greenways are viewed as amenities by residential, commercial and office park developers who, in turn, are realizing higher rental values and profits. Additionally, greenways in Asheville can also save local tax dollars by utilizing resource-based strategies for managing community stormwater and hazard mitigation, thus placing into productive use landscapes that would not normally be developable in a conventional manner.

Tourism plays a very important role in the economy of Asheville and the development of greenways can work to enhance this industry. Tourism is currently ranked as the number one economic force in the world. In several states, regional areas, and localities through-



out the nation, greenways have been specifically created to capture the tourism potential of a regional landscape or cultural destination. The State of Missouri, for example, spent \$6 million to create the 200-mile KATY Trail, which, in its first full year of operation, generated travel and tourism expenditures of more than \$6 million.

Health and Recreation Benefits

Greenways encourage more people to walk or bike to short distance destinations, which improves the health of residents. Studies have shown that as little as 30 minutes a day of moderate-intensity exercise (such as bicycling, walking, in-line skating or cross-country skiing) can significantly improve a person's mental and physical health and prevent certain diseases. Providing opportunities for participation in these outdoor activities, close to where people live and work, is an important component of promoting healthy lifestyles for Asheville residents.



In 1987, the President's Commission on Americans Outdoors released a report that profiled the modern pursuit of leisure and defined the current quality of life for many Americans. Limited access to outdoor resources was cited as a growing problem throughout the nation. The Commission recommended that a national system of greenways could provide all Americans with access to linear open space resources.

The proposed greenway system for Asheville would be developed to complement the community's existing parks and open space system. Trail systems could be developed not only for alternative transportation, but also to serve as primary recreation and fitness resources. Additionally, greenways can help meet the passive recreation needs of Asheville's growing population of older residents, enhancing the City's reputation as a popular place to retire.

Cultural Benefits

Greenways can enhance the culture and protect many of the historic resources in Asheville. Successful greenway projects across the United States have served as "main streets," where neighbors meet, children play, and community groups gather to celebrate. For cities and towns large and small, greenways have become a cultural asset and focal point for community activities. Some communities sponsor "greenway days" to celebrate the outdoors and local traditions. Various walking and running events are also held on greenways to support charity or extend traditional sporting events. Many civic groups adopt segments of greenways for clean-up, litter removal and environmental awareness programs. Some greenways, like San Antonio's Riverwalk, are the focal point not only for community activities, but also for economic development.



The richness and diversity of Asheville's historic resources are represented by numerous National Register of Historic Places and locally significant sites and historic districts. The interpretation of historic and archeological sites along greenways can serve to increase the awareness and appreciation of Asheville's rich history. Greenways can also be a vehicle to provide controlled public access to important cultural sites in a manner that promotes preservation and enhances interpretive opportunities.

Safety Benefits

Many Americans are concerned with crime. Some of the most successful deterrents to criminal activity have involved increased neighborhood awareness by citizens and participation in community watch programs. Greenways have proven to be an effective tool to encourage local residents to participate in neighborhood watch programs. Some greenways have even been developed as part of efforts to deter criminal activity in a neighborhood. Crime statistics and reports from law enforcement officials have shown that parks and greenways are typically land uses with the lowest incident of reported criminal activity.

As a recreation resource, alternative transportation corridor, or area where fitness activities can take place, most greenways provide a much safer and more user-friendly resource than other linear corridors, such as local roads. Greenways typically attract local residents, who use the facility frequently, creating an environment that is virtually self-policing. Additionally, greenways--whether publicly or privately owned--are dedicated for multiple use and are normally designed to meet federal, state and local standards for public safety and use.

Water Quality and Water Quantity Benefits

Greenways often preserve wooded open spaces along creeks and streams which absorb flood waters and filter pollutants from stormwater. Flooding has historically been a significant problem in many parts of Asheville. In some areas, buildings and other land uses have encroached into flood prone areas. By designating floodplains as greenways, the encroachments can be better managed, and in some cases, replaced with linear open space that serves as an amenity to local residents and businesses whose property lies adjacent to the greenway, as well as providing important flood water storage capacity.

As a flood control measure, greenway corridors serve as a primary storage zone during periods of heavy rainfall. The protected floodplain can also be used during non-flood



periods for other activities, including recreation and alternative transportation. In conjunction with existing stormwater management policies and programs implemented in the City, greenway lands can be established as development occurs.

The expense associated with the establishment of the greenway system can be offset by the savings realized in reduced flood damage claims. Additionally, for those residents who are required to purchase flood insurance, implementation of a community-wide greenway system in Asheville is likely to result in reduced flood insurance rates.

Greenway corridors also serve to improve the surface water quality of local rivers and creeks. The floodplain forests and wetlands contained within greenway corridors filter pollutants from stormwater. These pollutants are not removed if stormwater is collected in pipes and discharged directly into local streams and rivers. Improving surface water quality in streams not only benefits local residents, but also numerous forms of wildlife that depend on streams for their habitat. Additionally, “measurably improving water quality” would help meet one of the challenges presented in Regional Vision ‘95,--a strategic plan, sponsored by Land-of-Sky Regional Council, designed to shape and influence the future of Buncombe, Henderson, Madison and Transylvania Counties. In this plan, one of the critical issues was regional protection of the natural environment.



Air Quality Benefits

Greenways as alternative transportation corridors could serve to reduce traffic congestion, helping to improve local air quality. According to An Assessment of Air Quality in the French Broad River Valley (Land-of-Sky Regional Council, 1996), automobile emissions are a major source of the air pollutants nitrates and carbon monoxide in the Asheville area. One of the important recommendations of the Assessment was the “study and implementation of appropriate transportation control measures/programs to reduce mobile emissions”. Offering viable, alternative transportation choices through greenways would encourage people to bicycle and walk more often, especially on short trips, thereby reducing traffic congestion and automobile emissions.

Asheville is able to meet air quality standards at present and has not been designated as a federal “non-attainment” area. However, air quality monitoring shows that levels of air pollutants, such as ozone, are increasing. Due to the area’s topography, weather inversions can confine and concentrate these pollutants in the French Broad River Valley, causing air pollution concerns at times.



Plant and Animal Habitat Benefits

Greenway corridors can serve as viable habitat for many species of plants and wildlife. Greenway corridors provide essential food sources and, most importantly, access to water that is required by all wildlife. Additionally, greenway corridors in Asheville could become primary migratory corridors for terrestrial wildlife, serving to help maintain the integrity of many plant and animal gene pools. Some wildlife biologists have extolled greenways as future “gene-ways” and determined that migration routes are essential to



maintaining healthy wildlife populations. Greenways can also serve as “gene-ways” for plant species, which migrate with changes in climate and habitat. These “gene-ways” often follow river and stream corridors that have long served as transportation routes for animals and humans. Greenways in Asheville can be targeted as a primary habitat for many species of plants and animals. Programs can be established to not only protect the valuable existing forested and wetland areas of the City, but also to reclaim and restore streams to support higher quality habitat.